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OPERATIONS GROUP FILE

BBC →

4th July, 1980

Dear Sir,

Your article on the BBC Monitoring Service was not wholly inaccurate. We are indeed engaged in listening to open broadcasts from foreign radio stations, and all our output is certainly available to the press and public (for a small fee). It says so in the BBC Handbook. Most countries monitor foreign broadcasts nowadays; not many as openly as we do though (a recent visitor was a Moscow TV correspondent).

So its a strange story you tell about the material we monitored in Malawi being supplied secretly to the Rhodesian and South African authorities, either by the Malawi Government, the FCO or the BBC, or possibly all three. Why should those authorities have wanted anybody to tell them what their own, state-controlled, radios were saying (for that's what we were monitoring)? The Rhodesians, I'm sure, were doing their own monitoring of neighbouring radio stations - as do the South Africans. They had no need of - and certainly did not get - any assistance from us. Whoever was running the "Voice of Free Africa", broadcasting in Portuguese to Mozambique, would have been incredibly silly not to have listened to the output of Maputo Radio. There was simply no point in the exercise your article alleges took place.

Then there is the matter of our awful associates: the FCO, for instance, and the CIA. The BBC has its disagreements with the FCO from time to time but has never regarded it as a particularly sinister organisation. It would be very negligent of British interests if it did not want to know what Moscow was saying about the Schmidt/Brezhnev talks or Colonel Gaddafy about the fate of Libyans living in Britain.

I dare say there are some aspects of the CIA's activities we would not approve of, but the Foreign Broadcast Information Service does on behalf of the US Government exactly the same sort of work we do (and its reports are also freely available on subscription). Our co-operation goes back to the war years, long before the CIA came into being. It has been publicly acknowledged on many occasions and is good for Britain and the taxpayer. You too, Sir, and any of your readers can reap the benefit by taking out a subscription to our Summary of World Broadcasts.

Yours faithfully,

JOHN RAE

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